

Mexico City to Review Azerbaijan Statue

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Mexico City's government has appointed a committee to review and recommend a solution to the controversy over a statue of Azerbaijan's "founder of the nation" that was erected on the city's main boulevard, authorities said Monday.

The Stalinesque bronze statue of the late authoritarian leader Geidar Aliyev was erected by the Azerbaijani Embassy, which paid for the renovation of part of the city park where the statue sits.

A second statue donated by the Caucasus republic appears in another park Azerbaijan paid to renovate in downtown Mexico City.

Protesters have said they are offended by a monument to an authoritarian figure like Aliyev, who led Azerbaijan first as Communist Party boss during Soviet times and then as president from 1993 to his death in 2003.

The city's leftist government said it had appointed a three-member commission of academics and experts to review complaints about the statues.

Felipe Leal, the head of the city's department of urban development and housing, said the commission should look at the monument "with objectivity, a critical eye, to recommend what should be done in this case."

The secretary for Azerbaijan's ambassador in Mexico, Manuel Luna, said the city could run into problems if it removed the statue in the park.

"The project in the park involved a signed agreement that stipulates the statue must remain in place for 99 years," Luna told local media, adding that the issue "could affect our diplomatic relations."

Leal acknowledged that an agreement had been signed but said that "the city has to respond to the concerns of the community ... and evaluate what repercussions there might be."

He said the committee should take only a couple of weeks or so to make its recommendations, adding that the whole affair "may lead us to re-evaluate how these [project] approvals are made."

Azerbaijan's ambassador to Mexico, Ilgar Mukhtarov, wrote that Azerbaijan has lavished attention on Mexico because it was one of the first countries to recognize Azerbaijan after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

"This monument is not intended to improve anybody's reputation, because the world's perception of Heydar Aliyev does not require any rescuing," Mukhtarov said.

The second Azerbaijani statue downtown depicts a woman, her arms uplifted in mourning, commemorating Khojaly, a village where hundreds of Azerbaijanis were reportedly killed during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Advocates say a monument to Mexican suffering would have been more appropriate for a site once used as a police interrogation and torture center.

And Armenian sympathizers said the second statue's reference to genocide in Khojaly cannot be compared to the mass killings of some 1.5 million Armenians in the region in 1915.

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